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Polish–Arabic–English Trilingualism: A Case Study of Selected Language Biographies

Abstract

This paper utilizes linguistic biographies in order to exhibit the multilingualism of Poles living in present-day Egypt. It presents two model language biographies: a woman and a man brought up in Arabic culture. The respondents belong to the second generation of the Polish diaspora in Cairo and are the children of mixed marriages. The aim of the article is to explore the process of becoming and being a trilingual person, as well as to show the linguistic situation of people of Polish origin in Egypt and their language and cultural preferences in the context of self-identification. The research was conducted through personal interviews.

Keywords: language biography; individual multilingualism; Polish language outside Poland

1 The Linguistic Situation in Egypt

This article presents qualitative research on individual multilingualism based on the linguistic biographies of a woman and a man born into Polish-Egyptian families, with particular emphasis on the process of becoming trilingual. Both cases represent examples of Polish–Arabic–English trilingualism.

People of Polish origin in Egypt find themselves in an extremely complex linguistic environment. Firstly, in Egypt both Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA, itself rich in many regional and social subvarieties) are used depending on the situation and the medium of communication. The same is true in every other state where Arabic is the official language. As Boussofara-Omar points out, “both varieties are continually and dynamically shaping and reshaping each other, while creating new arenas for subsequent interaction, zones of convergence and divergence” (Boussofara-Omar, 2006, p. 636). Secondly, the role of the English language in Egypt seems to have gone far beyond its role as the lingua franca of the modern world. The prevalence of English in prestigious high-quality education (both in schools and universities) and new labour market requirements (with English often being the main/only language proficiency required for attractive job offers) makes it a literary language for many Egyptians these days.

Although the basic language used in Egypt since the Islamic conquest in the 8th century is Arabic (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004, p. 853), local languages spoken by ethnic minorities should also be mentioned. The Berber language is spoken in the Siwa Oasis in western Egypt on the border with Libya and the Nubian language is spoken in the southern region bordering Sudan.

Siwa, together with the smaller el-Gara Oasis located 100 km to the north-east, is the only enclave of Berbers in Egypt. The language they speak, Siwi, is used only in the oasis, located in the Western Desert, approximately 50 km from the border with Libya. The linguistic situation of the oasis was presented by V. Serreli, based on qualitative research: “The research falls into the

field of folk linguistics (Niedzielsky & Preston, 2000), a subfield of sociolinguistics emphasizing the study of non-specialists' perspective on linguistic facts. A qualitative approach was preferred in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomena and to be able to account for individual nuances." (Serreli, 2018, p. 229). The author collected 61 unstructured or semi structured interviews in 2013–2015 among men ($\frac{3}{4}$) and women ($\frac{1}{4}$) aged 9–70 years with different levels of education. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the interviewees are Siwi speakers, the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ are Bedouin Arabic (local) or Egyptian dialect speakers. The author cites fragments of the interviews, rather than the interviews in their entirety, showing various levels of the indexicality of the language.

The Nubian language exists in two main dialects – Nobiin and Kenuzi–Dongola, known to Egyptians as Fadijja/Fadicca and Kenzi (Abou-Ras, 2012, p. 5). Nubians live in areas straddling the border of Egypt and Sudan. In 1964, due to the construction of the High Dam in Aswan and the resulting flooding of the villages they inhabited, they were relocated to New Nubia near Kom Ombo. However, some Nubians later returned to their old homelands near Lake Nasser. As a result of migration, the Nubian language can also be heard in major Egyptian cities. Sanaa Gamal Sadek Abou Ras, a Nubian student of the American University in Cairo, examined the linguistic attitudes of Nubian students towards the Arabic language (ECA and MSA varieties) and the Nobiin and Kenuzi–Dongola Nubian dialects. These studies are quantitative and partly qualitative. They included 40 students (20 women and 20 men) living in both the Nubian part of Egypt (the research was conducted at the South Valley University in Aswan) and outside it (universities in Alexandria and Cairo). In her research, Abou Ras used a questionnaire, participant observation, and follow-up interviews with some of the subjects. The study revealed positive attitudes towards both Arabic and Nubian. The results did not register any significant differences between male and female students.

According to the Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, the Coptic language once spoken in Egypt has been an extinct language since the Middle Ages (12th / 13th century) but is still used as the liturgical language in the Coptic Church. A small number of families in Cairo speak Turkish at home, while some Italian, Greek and Armenian speaking communities live in Cairo and Alexandria (Wilmsen & Woidich, 2007).

When speaking of Arabic, one must keep in mind that we are not dealing with one language system. C. A. Fergusson, in his famous article "Diglossia" (Ferguson, 1959), distinguished two varieties/levels of the Arabic language: high (H) – used in formal and written situations, and low (L) – used in spoken and written informal situations. El-Said Badawi listed as many as 5 levels of the Arabic language: two levels of the classical language and three levels of the dialect (Badawi & Hinds, 1986). More models and approaches have been proposed to describe the situation of the Arabic language, seeing it as a system with a changing scale of features from the most common to the most literary (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004, p. 844).

Therefore, it is worth noting that the first language of my interlocutors, as well as other native speakers of the Arabic language, is the colloquial dialect of their immediate surroundings (ECA), referred to as *al-‘āmmiyya*. It is only at school (or possibly in kindergarten), when children learn to read and write, that they learn the literary version of the Arabic language. As they are related but different language systems, learning Modern Standard Arabic, referred to as *al-fuṣḥa*, takes several years and requires effort.

As Nadia Abdulgalil Shalaby emphasizes, the linguistic situation in Arab countries puts native Arabic speakers in situations in which they are required to choose one of many codes: "Thus, the repertoire of the average native speaker of Arabic includes a number of codes from which to choose and mix. Choices are generally not random; besides reflecting the attitudes of speakers to the varieties chosen, they also reflect the identities of their users seek to negotiate or affirm by their choice of code (s)" (Shalaby, 2021, p. 120).

2 The Research

The research presented in this article uses the method of linguistic biography. This method is popular in research on Polish-foreign multilingualism, both for groups and individuals. For an overview of the works in this field, I would refer the reader to W. T. Miodunka’s paper “Biografia językowa jako jedna z metod badania dwujęzyczności” (“Linguistic biography as one of the methods to research bilingualism”) (Miodunka, 2016). The article lists the data that should be included in the study of a multilingual person: the age of language acquisition, competence in each language, people with whom the person communicates in each language, the subject’s attitudes towards each language, and cultural identity (Miodunka, 2016, p. 52). The author analyses the role of this method in scientific research on linguistic contacts, placing it within other methods in the social sciences and humanities, and presenting its most important features.

M. Głuszkowski very consciously used linguistic biography to study the bilingualism of the Old Believers from the Suwałki–Augustów region of Poland. Referring to works in the field of psychology and sociology, the researcher identified the most important periods of linguistic biography:

- the language of the family home and in the pre-school period,
- the language of neighbourly contacts,
- the language of the school period (adolescence),
- the language of the family in the period of maturity,
- the language of the workspace.

H. Krasowska used the method of linguistic biography to demonstrate the multilingualism of Poles living in Bukovina in multi-ethnic villages within a Ukrainian, Romanian, German and Russian linguistic environment (Krasowska, 2020). In the article, she examines 30 cases (22 women and 8 men) from the oldest generation and presents 3 exemplary language biographies of women. They are divided into the development periods proposed by M. Głuszkowski, presented by the respondent in her authentic language, accompanied by the author’s commentary. Linguistic biographies consist of two parts – the linguistic facts and the analysis of the respondents’ language. The author paid special attention to the language of religion, which is an important element of the identity of Poles from Bukovina.

By presenting the results of his research on the Ukrainian-Russian-Polish trilingualism of Ukrainians of non-Polish origin, P. Levchuk revealed this phenomenon in a group dimension. The researcher presented collective multilingualism on the basis of the analysis of quantitative surveys that covered 1,160 persons living in both Poland and Ukraine (Levchuk, 2020). In chapter seven, the author presents six models of becoming and being a trilingual person, illustrating each model with the language biographies of selected informants. He refers here to the seven models and linguistic biographies of Polish–Portuguese bilingualism described by W. T. Miodunka (Miodunka, 2003).

When collecting research material on Polish–Arabic–English trilingualism, triangulation was applied, supplementing the scenario-based telephone conversations (approx. 30 minutes) with written surveys, texting through messengers, conducting longer interviews via zoom (partially structured in a casual and relaxed atmosphere and lasting approximately an hour), and participant observation during interviews. The research was conducted in 2020–2021. This article presents the language biographies of a woman and a man belonging to the second generation of the Polish community in Cairo. Both respondents are trilingual and come from mixed marriages where the mother is Polish and the father is Egyptian. The biographies presented below are divided according to the periods distinguished by M. Głuszkowski and supplemented with the data mentioned by M. Miodunka. The biographies retain the original language of the interlocutors, without any corrections.

3 Linguistic Biography of LO (b. 1981, TV Presenter)

LO was born in Cairo but shortly thereafter her parents moved to Poland, where she lived for about 4–5 years. Her mother spoke to her in Polish and her father in Arabic. Therefore, she learned two languages simultaneously in her early childhood. When she was about 5, she returned to Cairo with her parents and her younger sister, where she lives to this day. In Cairo she attended school, studied at university and married an Egyptian man. She used to travel to Poland sporadically on holidays to visit her family. The last time she visited Poland was before the Egyptian revolution in January 2011.

3.1 Childhood / The Language of the Family Home

LO: *Z mamą po polsku. Tato ze mną rozmawiał po arabsku. Ale siedzieliśmy u babci wtedy [in Poland], najwięcej to było polski język, nie arabski. Rodzice rozmawiali ze sobą po polsku, bo tata znał polski język. Kończył studia, doktorat w Polsce po polsku.*

Co studiował twój tata w Polsce?

LO: *To się mówi techniczna rolnicza? zirā'a [Ar. 'agriculture'], agriculture, szczególnie... jak to się mówi, Food Science Department, to chyba nazywa się po polsku techniczna rolnicza, ten kulliyya [Ar. 'institute'], an institute w Olsztynie.*

The informant learned two languages simultaneously at home in her early childhood. She spoke Polish to her mother and Arabic to her father. However, the language at home was mainly Polish, due to the fact that her father knew Polish and her mother did not know Arabic yet (her parents spoke Polish to each other). They lived at home with her Polish-speaking grandmother. The entire linguistic environment was Polish. The dominant language was, of course, Polish. Due to her father, she also had contact with Arabic, but had no contact with the English language at the time.

3.2 The Language of School and Adolescence

LO: *Nie rozmawialiśmy po angielsku w szkole, ale miałaś wszystkie materiały po angielsku. Matematyka, angielski język i science też, arabski i religia to po arabsku. Jak jesteś do szóstej klasy to zawsze miałaś wszystko po angielsku, oprócz arabski język. Bo to nie była służbowa szkoła, to była prywatna szkoła. Były takie te służbowe szkoły, takie że wszystko masz po arabsku, a inne szkoły nazywały się experimental, tagribiyya [Ar. 'experimental'], że masz po angielsku wszystko oprócz arabski język.*

Gdy poszłaś do szkoły, to znałaś dobrze język arabski?

LO: *Chyba na pewno znałam, bo mieliśmy wtedy zawsze egzaminy albo takie testy, że piszesz, że rozumiesz słowa po arabsku, na pewno. Tak mi się wydaje, że tata też do mnie dużo rozmawiał po arabsku. Bo mam jeszcze stare papiery, kiedyś u taty znalazłam, takie te testy, że wiesz, że piszesz your name ya'nī [Ar. 'meaning, it means'], twoje nazwisko i imię i tam te alfabety po arabsku.*

Czy była jakaś różnica pomiędzy językiem arabskim, który znałaś z domu, a językiem arabskim, który usłyszałaś w szkole?

LO: *My tak gadamy inaczej, ale to nie jest taka bardzo duża różnica. Mój tato miał dyploma po arabsku, on czytał z nami dużo bil-fuṣḥa [Ar. 'Standard Arabic'] jak to się mówi, ten taki oficjalny język. Zawsze mi mówił albo poczytał książkę dla mnie, żebym więcej znała fuṣḥa, więc to nie było tak trudno.*

Czy oprócz arabskiego i angielskiego uczyłaś się w szkole innego języka?

LO: *Ja uczyłam się francuski, ale nie na długo, 6 lat w szkole. Lubię francuski język, ale znaczy że więcej tam nie ya'nī, didn't, ana ma-hasimtu-hūš [Ar. 'I did not take it seriously'], ya'nī, więcej się nie uczyłam później nie próbowałam na przykład czy brać kursy czy coś takiego. Jak*

byłam w szkole bardzo lubiłam, oglądałam filmy po francusku, słyszałam piosenki, ale dalej nie uczyłam się więcej.

Znasz język polski ze słyszenia. A jakiś kontakt formalny jak nauka alfabetu, pisania?

LO: *Wiesz co, kiedyś mama w domu, ale jak byłam troszeczkę starsza i moja siostra, zaczęliśmy tak, mieliśmy te książki z alfabetem, końcówki, ale to długo tak nie trwało, bo nam się znudziło* (laughter).

When LO was about 5 years old, her family moved to Cairo, where Arabic became the language of contact within the environment outside the home. However, Polish still remained the home language. Her mother, who spent most of the time at home, learned Arabic from a neighbour, and when LO was about 12, her mother gradually began to speak more Arabic at home, especially with her husband. At the age of 5, LO went to a private school, where she studied in English. The contact of students with the teacher and students with each other was in Arabic, while lessons were conducted in English, apart from Religion and Arabic. Everything indicates that LO spoke a lot with her father in Arabic when the family lived in Poland, because when she returned to Cairo and started school she had no problems with this language. LO did not attend the Polish school in Cairo. She knew Polish from her mother, her Polish family, and Polish friends of her mother in Cairo. Arabic began to dominate after LO started to study Mass Media Communication at university (solely in Arabic), as much as English used to be predominant at school.

3.3 Home Language in Adulthood

LO: *Wcześniej to zawsze po polsku, jak siedziała sama z nimi to po polsku, ale później to wiesz co takie statement, że kawał po polsku i kawał po arabsku na przykład ya'nī: daj mi šībšib [Ar. 'flip flops']; albo jak jesteśmy w kuchni razem na przykład mam coś kroić albo wymyć to tak miksuje wtedy język, np. Iḡsīlī [Ar. 'wash'] pomidory. Ta starsza córka długo siedziała z mamą, to lepiej rozumie i mówi po polsku. A ta młodsza już nie, nie siedziała z mamą, bo ya'nī później zawsze ze starszą siostrą rozmawiali ze sobą po arabsku, jak w szkole to po angielsku, no to tak druga ya'nī nie rozmawia tak dużo po polsku.*

Od czego zależy wybór języka w domu?

LO: *Czasami czuję, że tak długo nie rozmawiałam po polsku i muszę ćwiczyć ten język, no to dobra coś powiedziemy, poczytamy albo mamy zadanie domowe w polskiej szkole, to więcej siedzimy i czytamy coś.*

Czy rozmawiacie w domu po angielsku?

LO: *Nie używamy angielski język, ya'nī ja nie lubię, ja zawsze mówię moje dziewczynki jak zaczynają po angielsku rozmawiać - a czemu po angielsku? Przecież macie polski język, wtedy nikt nie będzie rozumiał. A angielski teraz wszyscy ludzie, zawsze krzyczę na nich, że musicie po polsku więcej, bo tak po angielsku no to wszędzie z koleżankami, w klubie zawsze dzieci rozmawiają ze sobą po angielsku. A o to chodzi, że tutaj w Egipcie dużo ya'nī jak to się mówi parents, rodziców lubię gadać po angielsku z dziećmi. Jak idziesz gdzieś to wszędzie słyszysz w mall, w klubie, obojętnie gdzie to zawsze lubię: ubierz swój nie wiem co tam, to lubię po angielsku powiedzieć ya'nī, a to dla mnie nie wiem (laughter). Ja zawsze się dziwię, bo w Egipcie nikt nie lubi ten język arabski, żeby ya'nī, ok znam francuski znam niemiecki no to dobra, ja znam polski język, no to też szprecham po polsku (laughter). To się mówi po arabsku fašhara [Ar. 'showing off'], nie wiem jak to wytłumaczyć, tak lubię w Egipcie wiesz co, że nawet z ubraniem, że mam brand, że zawsze kupuję z Ameryki moje ubranie.*

LO speaks Arabic with her Egyptian husband. She speaks Arabic and sometimes Polish with her daughters, for example while doing homework. The older daughter (15 years old) has just graduated from the Polish School in Cairo (a weekend school). The younger daughter currently attends the fifth grade. LO states that when the children were younger, she had more frequent contact with the Polish language due to watching Polish cartoons, listening to songs, and reading books with her daughters. She also uses Polish at meetings of the Polish community, organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Cairo.

3.4 The Language of the Workplace

LO: *Na pewno po arabsku, bil-fuṣḥa [Ar. 'Standard Arabic']. Ja pracuję na news jako spikerka, czytam dziennika i mam programy. Jeden program, który dyskutuje o Afryki, w kilka krajach, to raz na tydzień tylko, w czwartek, dzisiaj mam w nocy, na przykład dzisiaj co się stało w Egipcie, w Libii, Gabon, w Mali, zależy co tam, jaki jest, what's the main news about one of the African countries, to wtedy o tym rozmawiamy, interview ya'nī robimy interview, i mam jutro dziennika na przykład. Też mam taki program jak Kawa i herbata w Polsce ranny.*

Angielski używam jak mam czasami interview, bo na przykład robimy interview w ambasadzie połączone do ten program Afryki, też kilka razy pojechałam gdzieś, jak jest jakaś konferencja, obojętnie gdzie, potrzebujesz język, żeby robiłaś interview na przykład z minister itd. Jak był prezydent Mubarak, był 10 lat temu, pracowałam wtedy reporter ya'nī reporter, murāsīl [Ar. 'reporter'], reportaże robiłam z prezydent, kto dzisiaj spotkał, gdzie pojechał itd. Też kilka razy byłam z Sisi we Francji, Włochy kiedyś. Wtedy potrzebujesz angielski język ya'nī, to jest takie międzynarodowe, że wszędzie możesz używać angielski język.

3.5 Attitude Towards Language

Functionally, the first language of the respondent is Arabic. LO uses Arabic at home, at work, and in contacts with her milieu. She only uses English at work for professional purposes (and recently, due to COVID, not very often). Polish is used occasionally at events of the Polish Embassy or the Polish School, and sometimes at home, e.g. when doing homework with her younger daughter.

LO: *Ja używam arabski język, nie mam gdzie, żeby rozmawiać po polsku. Wszystko mam w pracy po arabsku, muszę dobrze znać arabski język. Angielski to dla mnie taki język do, jak pracuję jak gdzieś mam jechać za granicę to dla mnie angielski język, nie czuję, że wow.*

Nie o to chodzi, że wolę arabski, bo wiesz angielski to jest uniwersalny język i wszędzie możesz go używać, to łatwiej na przykład kiedy tutaj rozmawiasz w Egipcie z ludźmi, które są zza granicy, to wtedy używasz angielski język. To dla mnie ważne, ale tylko dlatego. Tak żeby porozmawiać po angielsku z koleżankami i tak dalej, nie, to dziwne dla mnie ya'nī do Egipcjanki to na pewno po arabsku ya'nī, mieszkam w Egipcie i muszę po arabsku rozmawiać ya'nī. Polski język nie możesz go tak używać na co dzień, tylko jak jesteś z Polakami, nie jak angielski na przykład, ale zawsze tak chętnie lubię rozmawiać z babcią albo z ciocią, żeby nie zapomniała ten język, ya'nī. Dzieci jak byli mali to więcej oglądaliśmy bajki po polsku, to było bardzo fajnie, teraz to już nie, ya'nī, kiedyś też były fajne piosenki i programy po polsku, angielskie ale tłumaczone na polski na przykład BBC Cbeebies, było to bardzo fajne, oglądaliśmy Pan Robótka.

3.6 Linguistic Competence

The respondent rated her Arabic language competence as the highest, both ECA and MSA: *Zawsze myślę jak to jest po arabsku i jak wytłumaczyć na angielski albo na polski, bo zawsze arabski język, ya'nī, dobrze się go uczyłam fuṣḥa i 'ammiyya, znam z gramatyki z pisanie, z poezji itd., no to zawsze po arabsku mam te słowa w głowie i tłumaczę to później na angielski albo na polski. [I always think how to say it Arabic and how to explain it in English or Polish, because it is always Arabic, ya'nī, I've learned it well, both fuṣḥa and 'ammiyya, that I know from writing to grammar, poetry, etc., so always I have these words in Arabic in my head and I translate them later into English or Polish.]*

She also rates her level of English as very high. When it comes to the Polish language, the informant gives the lowest scores to writing and grammar: *No tak, ya'nī, jak piszę to bardzo rzadko, ya'nī, nigdy nie pisałam, tylko jak gdzieś coś do cioci i muszę sprawdzić przez google wiesz albo pytam córkę, bo ona uczyła polską gramatykę, końcówki więcej niż ja się uczyłam tego. To znaczy to jest takie: wszystkiego najlepszego, jak się czujesz, byłam gdzieś, takie krótkie messages, krótkie smsy. I zawsze nie jestem pewna czy tak ok czy nie ok, ya'nī, piszę jak słyszę. [(“Well,*

ya‘nī, as I write very seldom, ya‘nī, I never wrote much, just like something to my aunt and I have to check through Google, you know, or ask my daughter, because she learned Polish grammar, the endings, better than me. That is, thing like: wishing all the best, how are you, I’ve been somewhere – short messages, short text messages. And I’m not always sure if it is ok or not ok, ya‘nī, I write what I hear.”]

When I texted LO in Polish, she replied in English, yet she always understood perfectly what I had written in the messages.

3.7 Cultural Identity

Wiesz co ja jak tutaj jestem w Egipcie, ya‘nī, I deal with people jakby byłam, ya‘nī, całkiem Egipcjanka. Jak jestem w Polsce to inaczej. Znaczą ludzi zawsze mówią, że ty masz taki mix, ale ja tego nie wiem, nie czuję. Znaczą moje koleżanki w pracy na przykład albo jak byłam w szkole, ja nigdy w pracy nie mówiłam, że moja mama jest Polka, when you act with people or really act to something happening, ya‘nī, mówią, że nie jesteś pure Egyptian. W Egipcie mi mówią, że niemożliwe że jesteś taka na 100 procent, na pewno jest coś innego.

LO points out that when she is in Egypt she feels like an Egyptian, while in Poland she feels different. However, her visits to Poland have been less frequent lately. She states that in Egypt she has never been perceived as “purely Egyptian” by other Egyptians (first at school, then at work). Although her colleagues do not know that her mother is from Poland, hear her level of Arabic, and have no grounds to suspect that she is not Egyptian, they still always see her other, non-Egyptian, non-Arabic identity. LO identifies herself with both cultures, though to different degrees.

When analysing the vocabulary, it is noticeable that LO very often uses the Arabic filler word *ya‘nī* “that is / it means”, which indicates that she must have thought first in Arabic, and then searched for the appropriate words in Polish to explain what she means. Borrowings from both Arabic and English appear in her speech.

From Arabic: *zīrā‘a* “agriculture”, *kullīyya* “faculty”, *tagribīyya* “experimental”, *murāsīl* “reporter”, *bīl-fuṣṣḥa* “in the literary language” and *‘ammiyya* “in colloquial”, *ya‘nī* “that is / it means” and also from the Egyptian Colloquial Arabic: *faṣḥara* “bragging, showing off, pretending to be wealthy from the upper class”.

From English: “agriculture”, “Food Science Department”, “an institute”, “science”, “experimental”, “your name”, “parents”, “statement”, “mall” (*w mall* – “at the mall”), “news”, “speaker” (*pracuję na news jako spikerka* – “I work as a speaker in the news broadcast”), “interview”, “messages”, “pure Egyptian”.

LO utilizes Arabic and English borrowings side by side in one answer, when she has difficulties finding a Polish equivalent: *To się mówi techniczna rolnicza? zīrā‘a, agriculture... to chyba nazywa się po polsku techniczna rolnicza, ten kullīyya, an institute w Olsztynie*. [You say agricultural, technical, zīrā‘a, agriculture? I think it is called technical agricultural, the kullīyya, an institute in Olsztyn]. In the next example, the subject uses English and then Arabic: *a inne szkoły nazywały się experimental, tagribīyya, że masz po angielsku wszystko* [And the other schools were called experimental, tagribīyya that you have everything in English].

The interlocutor uses both Arabic and English for more specific terms, e.g. related to university, and replaces Polish lexemes with Arabic when speaking about local realities, e.g. *bīl-fuṣṣḥa* and *bīl-‘ammiyya*, and also the word *faṣḥara*, which is related to Egyptian social reality. She used several loanwords only in English, without Arabic equivalents, e.g. “parents”, “mall”, “news”, “interview”, “messages”, “pure Egyptian”.

The interviewee uses Polish-Arabic code switching only when quoting her mother’s words in order to accurately present her speech, e.g. *daj mi šībšīb* [pass the slippers], *iḡsīlī pomidory* [wash tomatoes (imperative)].

LO consciously uses Polish and English in one sentence, but with an Arabic filler word, e.g. *interview ya‘nī robimy interview* [interview, that is doing an interview]; *Wiesz co, ja jak tutaj*

jestem w Egipcie, ya'nī, I deal with people jakby byłam, ya'nī, całkiem Egipcjanka [You know, when I am here in Egypt, I deal with people as an Egyptian, completely Egyptian]; *when you act with people or really act to something happening ya'nī, mówią, że nie jesteś pure Egyptian* [when you act with people or really act to something happening, that is they say you are not pure Egyptian]. In one sentence, she used Polish, English and Arabic (both Standard Arabic and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic): *Lubię francuski język, ale znaczy że więcej tam nie ya'nī, didn't, ana ma-hasintu-hūš, ya'nī, więcej się nie uczyłam później nie próbowałam na przykład czy brać kursy czy coś takiego* [I like French, but I, you know, I did not take it serious, that is I did not study it late, nor did I enrol in French language courses or something]. One can clearly see that the interviewee was looking for the right words in English, but found them in the Egyptian Colloquial.

The above-mentioned examples of replacing Polish lexemes with Arabic and English words, consciously used by LO, may have two reasons:

1. The respondent feels more confident using the Arabic language and tries to translate from it into Polish and English. She uses English vocabulary for my benefit, as she knows that I do not speak Arabic
2. The respondent, by replacing Polish lexemes with both Arabic and English, demonstrates the process of searching for the appropriate word to express her thoughts.

4 Language Biography of RT (b. 1990, Music Producer, Audio Engineer, DJ)

RT was born in Wrocław, where he lived for the first year of his life before his family moved to Egypt. He spoke Polish to his mother and Arabic to his father. His parents spoke English to each other and his mother was an English teacher in Cairo. He attended a private English-language school in Cairo. Until the age of 19, he stayed mainly in Egypt, apart from occasional trips to Poland for holidays. After his first year of studies in Cairo, he moved to Poland for 3 years to study Sound Engineering at the University of Poznań. He later continued his studies in London, where he stayed for a total of 3 years, before coming back to Cairo to start a career in music. RT describes his place of residence as “between Warsaw and Cairo”. At the time of the first survey and telephone conversation, he was in Cairo, whereas during our last interview, he had been in Warsaw for a month, from where he went to London for training. All three languages have been present in his life since early childhood up to the present.

4.1 Childhood / The Language of the Family Home

RT: *Jeśli chodzi o języki, to można powiedzieć, że tak równolegle jakby to było raczej. Matka do mnie po polsku mówiła, ojciec po arabsku. Byłem w Egipcie, więc pewnie więcej arabskiego było wokół mnie.*

Czy angielski jest językiem, który znasz z domu? Słyszałeś go w domu od rodziców?

RT: *Nooo można tak powiedzieć, z domu, ze szkoły.*

RT spent his childhood in Egypt in an Arabic-language environment. His home languages were both Polish and Arabic, as he spoke with his mother in Polish and with his father in Arabic. His parents communicated in English, so he had informal contact with this language before going to school.

4.2 The Language of School and Adolescence

RT: *Szkoła językowa i przedszkole językowe po angielsku, też mieliśmy arabski, ale przeważnie po angielsku. Mieliśmy tam trochę też francuskiego, trochę niemieckiego, ale głównie po angielsku, arabski, religia, geografia były po arabsku.*

Mówiłeś już po angielsku kiedy poszedłeś do szkoły?

RT: *Cieężko mi pamiętać. Ale nie pamiętam, że miałem jakieś problemy z angielskim ogólnie. Nawet jak mówię po angielsku to tak bardziej naturalnie jakby. To nie jest tak, że muszę się zastanawiać nad czymś, czy tłumaczyć. Ale jak to było wtedy, to kurcze ciężko mi pamiętać.*

Miałeś kontakt z językiem polskim formalnym, uczyłeś się pisania, gramatyki?

RT: *Chodziłem w Egipcie do Polskiej Szkoły na Zamalku [district of Cairo]. Skończyłem polski i historię na poziomie podstawówki.*

Czy twoja mama zaczęła mówić do ciebie po arabsku w pewnym momencie?

RT: *Nie, my się zawsze po polsku komunikujemy. Między nami się nie zmieniło. Jak się zna kilka języków to tak mówi się po polsku, czasami się dorzuci jakieś słowo z innego języka, czasami się nie pamięta jakiegoś słowa, to człowiek mówi go z angielskiego czy z arabskiego. Ale to chyba tak jest jak się używa paru języków i druga osoba też zna te same języki.*

Dlaczego zdecydowałeś się na studia w Polsce?

RT: *Studiowałem w Egipcie przez rok zanim do Polski pojechałem, stwierdziłem że nie chcę studiować dalej tam, to się nazywa Business po angielsku, zarządzanie, coś w takim stylu. Trochę byłem związany z Egiptem, w sensie, że tu znajomi, koledzy, ale z drugiej strony też chciałem wyjechać, uczyć się. Chciałem studiować w Polsce, bo taki kierunek był co mnie interesował akurat w Polsce i wydawało się, że to jest dobra rzecz. Studiowałem inżynierię dźwięku, czyli tak na Wydziale Fizyki, można powiedzieć, że to takie matematyczne, po polsku studiowałem. Ja się matematyki i takich spraw po angielsku uczyłem, ale to nie był jakiś wielki problem, matematyka nie ma jakiegoś języka, są pewne wyrażenia, ja znałem je po angielsku i musiałem je poznać po polsku, na przykład ja bym powiedział "equation" po angielsku, takie że masz x plus y równa się czegoś tam...*

Równanie?

RT: *No równanie, na przykład widzisz ja zapomniałem, a jak przyjechałem na studia to nie wiedziałem co to jest równanie tylko wiedziałem co to jest equation, ale jak zobaczyłem to się jakoś dogadaliśmy. Na egzaminie z matematyki to trochę tam po angielsku, trochę po tego, tak że jakoś tam poszło. Jakoś dało rady.*

W Anglii studiowałem jakby to samo, tylko kontynuacja, rozszerzenie. Produkcja dźwięku, sound design do filmów, to bardziej już tak na takim artystycznym konczie, w Polsce raczej techniczne bardziej, a tam bardziej poszło w artystyczny kierunek. Tam studiowałem po angielsku, to było w Londynie, z 3 lata chyba, rok studiowałem i reszta to praca i różne rzeczy. Fajny czas to był.

RT graduated from a private English school where most subjects were taught in English, except for Arabic and Religion. The contact between the students and the teacher was in Arabic, while the language of instruction was English. He also graduated from the Polish School of J. M. Dzieduszycki at the Polish Embassy in Cairo, where he learned the basics of the Polish language and history at primary school level. After a year of studying Business in Egypt, he went to Poland for three years, where he studied Sound Engineering at the Faculty of Physics at the University of Poznań. After his undergraduate studies, he continued in London. After three years in Poland and another three in England, he returned to Cairo.

4.3 Language in Adulthood and the Language of the Workspace

RT: *To jest trudne, powiedziałbym trzy języki po równi. W zależności gdzie jestem, w jakim kraju. Jeżeli jestem w Egipcie to wiadomo, to się po arabsku mówi z ludźmi. Z mamą po polsku. A w Egipcie z rodziną to po arabsku. Wszystko zależy od kraju. Zależy z kim rozmawiam. Mam takich znajomych co też są Polakami, na przykład mam takiego kolegę jest Polako-Jordańczykiem, ma historię taką jak ja, podobną, no i jak ja z nim rozmawiam to ja wiem, że on mnie rozumie i on wie, że ja go rozumiem. No to on mówi po polsku i nagle przechodzi na arabski, czy tam włoży słowo po arabsku i tak się możemy komunikować, bo jak wiesz z kim masz do czynienia to według tego się komunikujesz, tak mi się wydaje.*

A w Egipcie rozmawiasz po arabsku czy po angielsku?

RT: *Po arabsku raczej, zależy z kim też, bo czasami są Egipcjanie co lubią trochę po angielsku mówić. Nie ma tego w Polsce. To też wynika z takiej kultury chyba, nie? Bo tam to ludzie się lubią chwalić tym trochę, że tam znają dwie trzy słówka po angielsku, może tak mają, że chodziły do szkoły międzynarodowej i po prostu nie znają pewnych słów po arabsku, różnie, zależy od ludzi też w Egipcie. Ale głównie po arabsku.*

RT is single. He communicates in all three languages depending on the country he is in and the person he is talking to.

4.4 Linguistic Competence

The informant gives the highest marks to his language competence in ECA and in English. English is the language he studied: *...taki język czytania jakiegoś to język angielski. Pewnie to wynika z tego, bo chodziłem do szkoły w Egipcie i to po angielsku było i to jednak te pierwsze lata najbardziej, pisanie czytanie to po angielsku więcej tego było niż po arabsku i polsku. A też może dlatego, że taki świat mnie otacza, też zależy od tego skąd się cierpi informacje, na internecie czy coś, po polsku też mógłbym, telefon mam ustawiony po angielsku, a niektórzy mają po polsku i po arabsku, a ja wolę po angielsku mieć, bo jakoś tak szybciej widzę rzeczy. [...language like English. It's probably where it comes from. Because I went to school in Egypt and it was in English and it was the first years the most, writing reading was more in English than in Arabic and Polish. And maybe because such a world surrounds me, it also depends on where I get information, on the Internet or something, I could also search in Polish I guess, I could, my phone is in English (= has English interface), and some have Polish and Arabic, and Arabic, and I prefer English, because somehow I see things faster.]*

He rated his Polish language competence as lower than English, and his MSA competence as the lowest: *arabski pisany i czytany to jest ten foshā właśnie, bo nie pisze się tym egipskim, jakbym powiedział o foshā to nie używa się go na co dzień, trochę trudniejszy jakby. [Arabic to write and read is this fuṣḥā, because you don't write in Egyptian, as from fuṣḥā, I don't use it every day, like it's a little more difficult.]*

Whenever I sent text messages to RT, he always answered them in Polish, correctly and quickly.

4.5 Attitude Towards Languages

RT: *Mam ogólnie pozytywny stosunek. No może język polski, tak mi się wydaje, bo to jest rozmawianie z matką, ale jak muszę go używać tutaj w Polsce no to jednak czuję czasami z ludźmi, że nie mówię tak jak oni, komunikuję się, ale czuję się, że czasami nie rozumiem wszystkich słów, czasami się tak zdarza, mimo tego, że wydaje się, że dobrze mówię, to jednak czuję się pewniej kiedy mówię po arabsku lub po angielsku. Tak bym powiedział.*

Ja nie myślę w jakimś jednym języku, tylko w obrazach, widzę jakieś rzeczy. Nie tłumaczę, nie mam tak. Po polsku to po polsku, po arabsku to po arabsku.

RT points out that Polish is the language of communication with his mother, and so he feels emotionally connected with this language. He emphasizes that he communicates fluently in this language, but as an interlocutor he feels more confident in Arabic or English.

4.6 Cultural Identity

RT: *To się zmieniło z czasem, wychowałem się w Egipcie, te pierwsze lata mam takie silne, dużo biorę stamtąd. Ale z czasem człowiek podróżuje. Ja bym powiedział, że to są elementy, to się nie wiąże z tym, że ma się rodziców z różnych krajów, ale o doświadczenie człowieka, co człowiek wie, czego doświadczył i po prostu tworzy sobie jakieś zasady u siebie według jego osobistego wyboru. Na pewno mam elementy z arabskich stron i pewnie też nabrałem jakieś*

takie polskie czy europejskie wartości, sposób bycia, cokolwiek. Mieszane, co dobre z każdego próbuję brać. Jak jestem tu w Polsce czuję trochę, że jednak nie do końca tu należę do tej kultury w stu procentach. Ale jak jestem w Egipcie to czuję się bardziej jak Egipcjanin trochę. Jestem i z Egiptu i z Polski, mam dwa pochodzenia, nie jestem z jednego miejsca.

RT emphasizes that his childhood (spent in Egypt surrounded by Arab culture) had a very strong influence on his identity. He indicates that his identity was influenced not only by his parents' origin, but also by his own experience and travels. He is a multicultural person. He does not belong solely to Arab culture, nor does he view Polish culture as completely his own.

Analysing RT's speech, we can see that it does not demonstrate code switching. As he himself emphasized, he can replace a Polish word with an Arabic or English one if he knows that his interlocutor also knows all these three languages. During the conversation with me, he only spoke Polish (fluently and efficiently). It is worth noting that the Polish vocabulary of RT is very rich, allowing him to express his thoughts without any problems. In his speech, which is very correct, we can find only one word that was confused by the interlocutor: *skąd się cierpi informacje* (correct: *skąd się czerpie informacje: cierpieć* [to suffer], *czerpać* [to extract]).

5 Conclusions

The presented biographies show the process of becoming and being multilingual. Both interviewees were influenced by certain macrostructural and microstructural factors which, on the one hand, make their biographies similar and, on the other hand, significantly different. The common macrostructural factors are, first and foremost, the historical, political and geographical factors. The history of colonialism has had a huge impact on the linguistic situation in North African countries. In the case of Egypt, these were complex relationships with both France and England. Under Napoleon, Egypt opened up to Western Europe. This process was associated with the Egyptian expedition of Napoleon, which began in 1798, and the French Europeanization of Egypt (Hoff, 2016, pp. 28, 32). The influence of French culture on Egypt in the 19th century was very strong, and French, along with Turkish, was a very fashionable language among the social elites in Cairo. However, at the end of the 19th century the British were the most influential foreign power in Egypt and Sudan. After the Anglo-Egyptian War, from September 13, 1882, Egypt became a British protectorate, despite maintaining formal feudal subordination to the Ottoman Empire (Holzer & Stepniewska-Holzer, 2008, p. 13). The popularity and prestige of the English language grew throughout the 20th century, sustained by the growing American influence in the region, globalization, and the status of English language around the world (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004, p. 851). Among middle class Egyptians today, English is a language used in education from kindergarten to higher education, via private English-language schools. The trilingualism of my interlocutors is inextricably linked with the geographical area of their residence. As shown by research in the Middle East and North Africa region, language communities are at least bilingual, and often trilingual or multilingual (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004, p. 845). The fact that both interviewees live in Cairo and belong to a certain social class is the source of their Arabic–English bilingualism (the use of MSA and ECA is treated as diglossia, not as bilingualism).

The informants share some common social and linguistic background factors. They learned two languages simultaneously: Polish from the mother and Arabic from the father in early childhood at home. While LO's parents communicated in Polish until her mother learned Arabic, RT's parents communicated with each other in English. LO remained in the Polish language environment until the age of 5, while RT spent only the first year of his life in Poland. In early childhood their families moved from Poland to Cairo, and they found themselves in an Arabic linguistic and cultural environment.

An important factor influencing their linguistic behaviour is the educational aspect – both attended private schools with English as the language of instruction. As Nadia Abdulgalil Shalaby writes, “English and French in the Arab world are generally associated with science, progress,

advancement, and modernization. However, English is becoming the dominant European language in the Arab world. (...) The perceived value of English in the Arab world is attested by the rapidly increasing number of private educational institutions in which English is the language of instruction" (Shalaby, 2021, pp. 134–135). RT emphasizes that for him English is the language of learning and reading, a language in which he learns about the world around him. He also admits that it is a language in which speaking comes naturally to him, he feels more confident in this language than in Polish. LO positions English as the language of work and contacts with foreigners but adds that she reads a lot of information about world events in English. Both informants display an ironic attitude towards the use of English in Egypt between Egyptians.

The factors that differentiate the two language biographies are education in Polish and contact with Poland, the place of work, and the choice of a life partner.

RT learned Polish in primary school and finished his undergraduate studies in Poland, which affects his fluency in Polish (it is worth noting that Poland is an attractive place to study for people of Polish origin from Egypt). For LO, Polish is a spoken language which was never taught to her in a formal way. She admits to having problems with grammar and writing. She emphasizes that Polish is a language that she tries not to forget and pass on to her children. Her trips to Poland were also less frequent than in the case of RT. During the aforementioned conversations, RT was in Warsaw, while LO met her Polish family for the last time almost 10 years ago. It is worth paying attention to the emotionally positive attitude of the interviewees towards the Polish language as the language of conversations with the mother. As M. Głuszkowski noted, "even if the language acquired in the first years of life in the later period is used less frequently for various reasons, and a given bilingual person shows higher competence in terms of a different code, the language of childhood plays an important role in the emotional sphere" (Głuszkowski, 2011, p. 100). Work is an important sociolinguistic factor that influences linguistic behaviour. MSA is an attribute of professionalism in LO's professional realm, while the sign of professionalism in RT's work is knowledge of English. Due to work, he often travels between Cairo and Warsaw or London. LO has an Egyptian husband with whom she started a family.

The factors mentioned above influence the differences in the multilingualism of the respondents. LO's Arabic is the dominant language in her life and Polish (a functionally second language) and English (a functionally third language) fulfil only designated functions. As she said, she thinks mainly in Arabic, and then tries to translate these words into Polish or English. The mixing of codes that she sometimes used in her statements seems to confirm this. At the same time, her biography and responses in the interview show her willingness to speak and express herself in Polish. It is also important to note that LO sent her daughters to a Polish school, which confirms that she identifies herself with Polish culture and the Polish language.

In the case of RT, the three languages cannot be 'pigeonholed', because at this stage of his life they are all active and he uses them frequently. His multilingualism depends on the interlocutor and the country in which he is currently staying, therefore he cannot identify the dominant language. As he pointed out himself, he has no main language in which he thinks and then translates from into other languages. The choice of language depends on the interlocutor. When he knows that the person he is talking to knows the same languages as he does, he allows himself to switch codes to express himself as best as possible. When he spoke to me, he only used Polish. This proves that code-switching in his case concerns only the replacement of a word that he does not know or has forgotten in a given language, it is also used consciously and in a controlled matter.

The informants emphasize their positive attitude to the Arabic language, although to different varieties, which has been influenced by their studies and place of work. LO, who is a presenter on Egyptian State Television, rated her competence in MSA as very high, because her profession requires advanced competence of this language variety. It is worth noting that due to the position of Cairo as the largest Arabic cultural centre of mass media, the film industry and literature, the Arabic dialect of Cairo also enjoys high prestige both in Egypt and in other Arabic-speaking countries (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004, pp. 848–849). On the other hand, RT emphasizes his

positive attitude towards ECA and evaluates his MSA competence much lower, due to the fact that he studied in Poland and England and had less contact with this variety. In contrast, he expressed a positive attitude to and a high level of competence in ECA, the spoken language devoid of standard norms and codification that only foreigners learn from textbooks.


The multilingualism of the respondents is related to their multiculturalism. Although they have spent most of their lives in Egypt, they do not exclusively identify with Arabic culture. LO is often not fully recognized as a ‘pure Egyptian’ (despite the fact that she speaks perfect Arabic), although she does not describe this as a negative experience. Due to his lifestyle, travels and studies in different countries, RT emphasizes his multiculturalism. The elements, values and attitudes which he consciously draws from various cultures – Arabic, Egyptian, Polish and European – constitute his identity.

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